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Dr. A. SREENIVASAN :—"Is it not a fact that students were admitted to this special course of study after the commencement of the academic year according to University regulations?"

The Hon. Sri A. B. SHETTY :—"This question the hon. Member has put already once. I do not think he has raised any new points this time."

Price of firewood

* 322 *Q.*—Sri N. ANNAMALAI PILLAI : Will the Hon. the Minister for Agriculture be pleased to state—

(*a*) whether coupes in forest were let in auction for Rs. 6 fifteen years back and now let for Rs. 60;

(*b*) whether it is a fact that the price of the firewood has consequently increased; and

(*c*) whether the Government propose to take any steps to make the firewood available to the poor at a reduced price, and if so, what they are?

The Hon. Sri M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—"(*a*) It cannot be definitely stated that the coupes sold in auction at Rs. 6 per acre 15 years ago are now being sold at Rs. 60 per acre, since the coupes offered for sale year after year are not the same; and the sale amount depends upon various factors such as the density of growth, the market value of firewood, location of the coupes, etc.

"(*b*) It cannot be said that the higher price at which the fuel coupes are sold have contributed to the increase in the price of firewood. The cost of firewood has increased as a result of the war just like any other commodity.

"(*c*) According to the terms and conditions in the sale notice and agreement contractors should sell firewood to ryots at the concessional rates specified in the agreement; and this will meet the *bona fide* domestic requirements of the ryots to some extent."

Sri T. PURUSHOTHAM :—"May I know if there is any proposal to introduce a system of price control for firewood?"

The Hon. Sri M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—"All controls have gone. I do not think there is any proposal to have new controls."

Sri MOHAMED RAZA KHAN :—"When the prices of various commodities have gone down considerably, why is it that the price of firewood alone in the City of Madras has gone up abnormally? Therefore is not the Government of Madras partly responsible for this because they have raised the coupe rates?"

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THE HON. SRI M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—" That may be perhaps the argument put forth by certain contractors who do not like putting coupes in auction. But that has nothing to do with the price. It is due to scarcity of firewood available and also because of the difficulty in securing transport promptly."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAM :—" May I know what steps would be taken by Government to secure a fair price for this essential article? "

THE HON. SRI M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—" I do not think the remedy is by way of control. We have to secure more firewood and that is the only way to reduce the prices."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAM :—" May I ask the Hon. Minister whether there is any proposal to introduce fuel gas in major cities and may I know whether there is any firm which has applied for such a licence either in Madras City or in some of our municipalities? "

THE HON. SRI M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—" I want notice, Sir. But I may tell the hon. Member that we look forward to the day when the Lignite project would become a reality when this problem would be definitely solved."

SRI MOHAMED RAZA KHAN :—" Will the Hon. Minister kindly enquire into the whole matter and see to it that the price of firewood is brought to the normal level? "

THE HON. SRI M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—" I would look into the matter of the high price of firewood in Madras City."

SRI V. CHAKKARAI CHETTY :—" May I ask what steps the Government are taking to bring down the abnormal price of firewood that is obtaining now to a reasonable level? Are they unable to do it or are they unwilling to do it? "

THE HON. SRI M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—" I have already said that I shall look into the matter. If high prices are due to the scarcity of firewood, Government cannot help it."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAM :—" Is there any proposal under the consideration of Government to make coal available in such places at reduced rates as an alternative measure to control the high price of firewood prevailing now? "

THE HON. SRI M. BHAKTAVATSALAM :—" I want notice, Sir."